



## Palau

### International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

An archipelago of more than 300 islands in the western Pacific Ocean, the country has an area of 188 square miles and its population is approximately 20,000 persons; 70 percent live in the temporary capital, Koror. There are 19 Christian denominations. Roman Catholicism is the dominant religion; approximately 65 percent of the population are members. Other religions with a sizable membership include the Evangelical Church with an estimated 2,000 followers, the Seventh-day Adventists with approximately 1,000 members, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) with an estimated 300 adherents, and Jehovah's Witnesses with approximately 70 members. Modekngei, which embraces both animist and Christian beliefs and is unique to the country, has approximately 800 adherents. There also is a small group of Bangladeshi Muslims in the country and a primarily Catholic Filipino labor force (approximately 5,000 persons). A large percentage of citizens do not actively practice their faith.

Since the arrival of Jesuit priests in the early 19th century, foreign missionaries have been active in the country. Some missionaries have been in the country for many years. A number of groups have missionaries in the country on proselytizing or teaching assignments, including the Baha'i Faith, Roman Catholic Church, Chinese Agriculture Mission, Mormons, Evangelical Church, High Adventure Ministries, the Iglesia Ni Cristo, Jehovah's Witnesses, Korean Church, Korea Presbyterian Church, Pacific Missionary Aviation, Palau Assembly of God, and Seventh-day Adventists. The Seventh-day Adventist and Evangelical churches have missionaries teaching in their respective elementary and high schools.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government does not promote or restrain religious activities; however, the Government regulates the establishment of religious organizations by requiring them to obtain charters as nonprofit organizations from the Office of the Attorney General. This registration process is not protracted, and the Government did not deny registration to any group during the period covered by this report. As nonprofit organizations, churches and missions are exempt from paying taxes.

Foreign missionaries are required to obtain a missionary permit at the Office of Immigration; however, there were no reports that the Government denied these permits to any persons during the period covered by this report.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools. There is government financial support for religious schools that may be requested by representatives of any religion. The Government also provides small-scale financial assistance to cultural organizations.

The Government recognizes Christmas as a national holiday. There is active participation by the majority of the country's religious groups in Easter and Christmas services. Even though the Government does not sponsor religious groups or promote religious activities, activities such as national and state events or public and private graduations are always conducted with a prayer to open the ceremonies.

#### ***Restrictions on Religious Freedom***

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, there is a ban on work permits for citizens of Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka. The ban stemmed from a 1998 decision by the Division of Labor to deny work permits to Bangladeshi citizens following complaints from employers that workers' religious practices interfered with activities in the workplace and in living arrangements of employing families. A similar ban went into effect in 2001 for citizens of India and Sri Lanka. Workers from these countries present in the country at the time of the decision were not expelled, and there are no impediments to their practice of religion. A Muslim cleric visited The country in December 2004 to worship with the South Asian community. No problems were reported in connection with his visit.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### ***Forced Religious Conversion***

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### ***Abuses by Terrorist Organizations***

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

### **Section III. Societal Attitudes**

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The various religious organizations maintain cordial relations with each other.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials also maintain regular contacts with the various religious communities.

Released on November 8, 2005

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